Christ's Warning to the Churches

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A Sermon by

A. V. Griswold

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CHRIST'S WARNING TO THE CHURCHES.

A

SERMON

DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF THE

GENERAL CONVENTION

OF THE

PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH

IN THE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

ASSEMBLED IN TRINITY CHURCH, IN THE CITY OF NEW-YORK,

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BY THE RIGHT REVEREND

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CHRIST'S WARNING TO THE CHURCHES.

REV. ii. 7.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.

WHEN God is pleased to speak to man, it surely becometh man to hearken; and what his Spirit declares to the Church, should the Church with profound attention regard. Our Saviour Jesus Christ, during his ministry on the earth, gave whatever instructions were then necessary for the establishment of this his spiritual kingdom: the doctrines of his cross were revealed: the law and the prophets were explained: salvation, through faith in him, was clearly made known to those especially whom he had chosen to preach it: the means of grace and the ordinances of religion were appointed: the pure principles of holy living were disentangled from the corrupt morals of the Jews, and life and immortality were brought to light. When, after our Lord's ascension, his Gospel was published, and Churches were planted in various parts, such other regulations, order, discipline, and expositions of the Scriptures were added by his apostles, as circumstances and the state of religion then rendered necessary or expedient. And, finally, that nothing might be omitted, which is "profitable for

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doctrine, reproof, correction, or instruction in righteousness," after the lapse of many years, when the Gospel was spread, and Christianity was permanently established in many countries; when heresies had sprung up, and religion, both in doctrine and practice, was in some places corrupted; in a word, when the state of the Churches had become such, as it generally would remain through succeeding ages, it pleased the Lord to address, by revelation to his servant John, an epistle to each of the seven principal Churches of Asia. These epistles are contained in the first three chapters of this book.

Whilst our Lord personally ministered on earth, after advancing truths of high importance, and such doctrines as required particular regard, he often awakened the attention of his audience by this solemn admonition: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." 'Whoever is blest with understanding, and willing to be instructed, let him attentively consider what I now declare.' So in these epistles to the seven Churches, not less than seven times in two chapters, he repeats this awakening call on our attention: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches." The things which he now declares are not less important than those before revealed. They are warnings and admonitions which concern all the Churches of the earth, in every age and nation. They were evidently designed for general use: like all holy Scriptures, they were written for *our* learning, and claim our present consideration.

The Saviour of the world, by placing before us the state of these distinguished Churches, has shown to every Church the things which concern our peace. And may the same wise and good Providence give us grace and wisdom, so to apply them to our own case, and to make such improvement as shall show that we are of those who have ears to hear.

A subject then, brethren and friends, opens before us, vast as it is important. That our view of it may be sufficiently brief and comprehensive, let us hearken to what is said to these Churches under four general heads: In what they *commended:* for what *blamed:* with what *threatened:* and to what *exhorted.*

Under the first of these heads, it is painful to observe how few of these Churches are wholly *commended.* But two of the seven, Smyrna and Philadelphia, receive entire approbation, and of these two, the latter, having but "little strength," scarce escapes censure. This is a circumstance which should set us with the more anxious solicitude, and awakened apprehensions, to inquire into the state of religion among ourselves, and what is the present condition of those Churches with which, by duty and interest, we are more nearly connected.

Among the things for which some of the seven are praised, stands not the least conspicuous their *orthodoxy:* they had tried false apostles, and found them liars: they could not bear workers of evil, but reprobated ungodliness: they held fast the name of Jesus, and had not denied his faith in times of

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persecution. How far the same commendations may apply to ourselves, it would not become us positively to declare. But with humble confidence we may venture to affirm, that the Protestant Episcopal Church in these United States is in nothing more distinguished and worthy of praise, than in the purity of its faith, and of its apostolic order and discipline. We have reason to trust and to bless God, that in our Articles, Liturgy, and Religious Ministrations, the true doctrines of the holy Scriptures are clearly taught, and "the sacraments duly ministered, according to Christ's ordinance." Let then the comforting words of the Divine Spirit awaken our zeal and increase our desire of adhering steadfastly to these standards of our holy faith, and of earnestly contending for that "which was once delivered to the saints." At this perilous season, when the pride of reason is arrayed in arms against the strong holds of Christianity, and the poisoned shafts of a false philosophy are confidently aimed at the shield of faith; and when many who bear the Christian name, under the friendly colours of candour and liberality, are undermining the fairest towers of Zion, how ought we to rally around the banners of the cross, and to rear the standard of Christ crucified, which is to the latter a stumbling block, and to the others foolishness. We must follow after true charity, as the bond of perfectness; but we must also try the spirits, whether they are of God. "Who is a liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son."

From "times of persecution," through the mercy of God, we are delivered; and in grateful acknowledgment of this blessing, ought we the more steadfastly to "hold fast the name of Jesus, and not deny his faith." The worst heresy indeed, and the most dishonourable to God, is a wicked life; and let this be our abhorrence. But let it not be forgotten that false doctrines naturally produce errors in life. And though Christians may with undue confidence rest in their orthodoxy, without it certainly they are never safe. Correct principles are the pure element of spiritual health. If a right faith produces good living, which it clearly does, the more pure our faith is, the more holy will be its fruits. It is a fact well known, that corruptions in doctrine have usually been productive of laxity in morals.

Some of these Churches were also commended for their patient labour in the service of God, their good works, their faith, and their charity. And their example, with its just praise, should animate us to labour in the Lord, and not to be weary in well doing, knowing that in due time we shall reap if we faint not. The Spirit encourages us, with patient zeal and earnest diligence to bear without murmuring or despondence, the evils of life, and to encounter with fortitude, every obstacle in our Christian warfare. It is a faithful saying continually urged on those who name the name of Christ, and they who preach him are commanded to affirm it constantly, that believers be careful to maintain good works. Let the excellence of our faith be

evinced chiefly by the holiness of our lives. By no other evidence, indeed, can we show that we have any faith which is according to godliness. Let us remember, that " the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned." Let us pursue it as the summit of all moral excellence; the perfection of every Christian grace ; the image of God renewed in the soul, which shall still flourish when faith, and hope, and time have passed away. " Charity never faileth :" it is like the soul in which it dwells, immortal.

In the proposed order of hearing what the Spirit saith to the Churches, we are next to consider the things for which they are *blamed :* and we shall find it not an uninteresting, though the most painful part of our subject. Let us hear the word of reproof, and hearken to the exposure of our faults, with a view to mend them.

Some of them are censured for carelessness in morals, or laxity in discipline. At Sardis their " works were not found perfect." At Pergamos were those " who held the doctrine of Balaam," and " the doctrine of the Nicotaitans." These Epicurean Antinomians, as we may not improperly name them, under pretence, and with the affectation of superior knowledge, were extremely corrupt and sensual. In Thyatira they had " suffered that woman Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess," and whose doctrine was no less corrupt and pernicious than that of the Nicotaitans, " to teach and to seduce" the servants of God. It is our duty,

both ministers and people, to abstain from all unrighteousness, and to give no countenance to it in others. With the wicked and irreligious, the Christian should have no farther connexion and intimacy, than what his lawful business and the state of society make necessary. They who name the name of Christ, if they err from the truth, or depart not from iniquity, are to be admonished; and if they obstinately continue unreclaimed, they must be rejected. To refrain from all intercourse with vicious, worldly men, who make no profession of religion, is impracticable; "for then," as an apostle says, "must we needs go out of the world." So many are there of this character, and they in such business, offices, and stations, that without some dealings with them, we cannot pursue the necessary duties of life. "But if any man that is called a brother, be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, with such an one (he commands) not to keep company—no, not to eat." Let Christians unite as a band of brethren in every holy affection, and labour of love;—as a "body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part." Mutually and deeply concerned for the honour of God, and the salvation of men, let them faithfully watch over and exhort each other daily. By the Word of God, the Canons of his Church, and our holy profession, are we in duty bound, "with all faithful diligence to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's

Word, and to minister the doctrines, and sacraments, and the discipline of Christ, as the Lord hath commanded, and this Church hath received the same." The discharge of this duty will often require delicacy, and oftener be painful; but cannot with a good conscience be neglected by those who regard the Word of God, the interests of religion, and the salvation of immortal souls.

"The Church at Ephesus" are blamed for *losing their first love.* What their love at first was, we may gather from St. Paul's very excellent epistle addressed to the Ephesians, and from the history of his ministry among them, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Here did that zealous apostle labour for years, and his labours were crowned with great success. This city, the metropolis of the province called Asia, was rich and populous; for here idolatry had erected its throne. Its temple, built at the expense of all Asia, and dedicated to the goddess Diana, was reckoned among the wonders of the world. But the Lord "wrought special miracles (and greater wonders) by the hand of Paul," and Dagon fell before the ark of God. Many believed, confessed their sins, and burnt their books, to the amount, in price, of "fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed."

Tradition tells us, and the Scriptures clearly intimate, that Timothy was the first Bishop of that Church. But he probably had been removed to the Church above, and was not, at the time of writing these apocalyptical epistles, "the Angel of

the Church of Ephesus." St. John also had probably made this city his place of residence for several years; and, no doubt, as his manner was, he had exhorted them much "to love God," and "to love one another." "Nevertheless (saith the Spirit) I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." This mournful example of human frailty is set as a beacon to the Church of God. Though enriched with the abundance of Divine grace, they had grown cold in their affections, and remiss in duty. It remains with us to inquire, how far their case may be our own. This, at the present day, is unquestionably the prevailing fault of many Churches, and God only knows of how many individuals in every Church. How ill does our zeal comport with that holy ardour, that self denial, that love of God which animated the breasts of the early Christians! And no less, as individuals, let us ask, Has not the time been that our hearts were warmed with a more ardent affection in the cause of our blessed Redeemer? Let us remember whence we are fallen, and repent, and do our first works.

The Church in Sardis had a *name that they lived*, but were *dead;* a case as awfully alarming, as it is deplorably common. How many have the form of godliness, while destitute of the power! Their professions are orthodox; their creed is sound; their *name* is good; for they name themselves of Christ, the *living* Saviour: but they produce not the fruits of righteousness: their "faith is dead, being alone." Though careful and troubled about

many things, that which is of all things the most needful, they neglect. They are alive perhaps to every other thing. In the business of life they are prudent and industrious; in the pursuits of pleasure their soul is much engaged; for the bread which perisheth they labour with patient diligence, but in the service of Christ they are careless and idle. Is religion then the only business which requires no time—no sacrifice—no care? Is it only in what concerns the honour of God and our eternal salvation that we are stupid, thoughtless, and inactive?

But in the case of the Laodiceans, there was something more offensive to the Holy Spirit, than the coldness of the Ephesians, or even the death of those at Sardis. "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would that thou wert either cold or hot." They boasted of their goods and riches; but spiritually were "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." At Ephesus they had lost much of that godly love, which is the noblest product of a living faith. The Sardians had become lifeless in those works of charity, which are the fruit and the praise of Christianity. But in Laodicea there was a general apathy; a certain indifference and unconcern about spiritual things, more displeasing perhaps to God than infidelity; because, in its consequences, more injurious to religion. I *would*, he says, that thou wert *hot* or *cold*. Whether these words are to be literally understood, or rather to be taken as expressing strongly a detestation of lukewarmness, the

inference is the same: we must regard indifference respecting religion as most offensive, and dangerous. We had better be enthusiasts; or it were better that we had not known the way of righteousness, than to profess it without feeling its importance and regarding its duties. There is indeed, an estimate of religious zeal and godly affections current in the Christian world, which is much below the sacred standard, and debased with the alloy of worldly wisdom. It is too much the practice to brand every thing like a serious concern for a future state, and an active zeal for the salvation of others, as superstition or fanaticism. In all other things, in politics, in literature, in the pursuit of honours, of riches, or worldly pleasures, to be ardent, active, and very much engaged, is thought proper and commendable. To devote your heart and your hours to these things, and to pursue them by labour and care, is but common prudence, and the wisdom of the world. To speak of them often, and with raptures, is what even among Christians few would disapprove. But when we speak of God, who is the source of all good, must it be without emotion or sensibility? When we treat of that Divine love which passeth understanding; of that Saviour who is the Light and the Life of the world, must it be with coldness and devoid of animation? Yes, such is the religious taste;—such the standard of zeal too prevalent. If you would discourse at all on the doctrines of that cross on which alone our everlasting hopes depend, it must be on those

rare occasions only, when decency will not permit you to be silent. Let us remember what shall be the end of those who are ashamed of Christ before men. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Laodiceans.

It was proposed also to consider the things with which these Churches are *threatened*, and they are worthy of the most serious consideration. The Ephesians, who had lost their first love, God threatens, except they repent, to come quickly, and remove their candlestick out of its place. These Churches, in the figurative language of this book, are called Candlesticks, and their Pastors or Bishops are represented as candles burning in them. To these Pastors, called Angels, and in the first chapter, Stars, the epistles are respectively addressed; because, in their office, they represent their Churches, and are in some degree responsible for their purity and steadfastness. The zeal of this Church had much declined; and the Lord threatens to take from them the means of grace and their Christian privileges. Such a judgment must be most fearful to those who justly estimate religious blessings. Most awfully was it verified in the Ephesians. That city, once the glory of Asia, is now but an inconsiderable village, consisting of a few poor cottages: and the Church is reduced, it is said by a late traveller, to three Christians, and they extremely ignorant. Let all Churches, and let us particularly, consider what may justly be our own case. Though amongst us, as with them, the true doctrines of the Gospel

may be preached; its ordinances regularly administered, and the worship and discipline of the Church preserved in some tolerable degree of primitive excellence, have we not also the like coldness in our religious affections? the same languor in our devotions? the same defect of charity and active beneficence? Is there no decay of piety—no prevalence of sin—no laxity of discipline indulged, which may provoke the Lord to remove our candlestick, and to take his Holy Spirit from us? Have we that ardent affection towards God, that love and compassion for each other, which must ever distinguish the true disciples of Jesus Christ? Are we disposed, and are we diligent, according as we are able, to do good unto all men, and especially unto those who are of the household of faith? Are we not rather cold in heart, and negligent in duty? Are there no animosities, no jealousies, no root of bitterness among us? The Ephesians abused many and great privileges; and those surely are not few or small which we have received; and, should we follow their evil steps, how shall we escape the righteous judgments of God? Should he come for many years seeking fruit and find none, he will say, as to a barren fig-tree, "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" Thus has he punished many Churches. Where now are those noble Churches of Asia, once the glory of the Christian name? Alas, how fallen and trodden under foot of "Jews, Turks, and Infidels!" Where Christ, the living Saviour, was preached with astonishing success, "false prophets" now

prevail. Where once the most triumphant songs of Zion rejoiced the hearts of twice ten thousand saints, how do the ways of Zion mourn! Such too, and not less to be lamented, is even now the state of many Churches in our own country. Some are much decayed; some totally fallen away and desolate; others, though their candlesticks may remain, their lights are removed, and they are left destitute of all Gospel ministrations. And why has the Lord thus forsaken them? Too evidently because they had forsaken the Lord, and lost their first love. Their Pastors, we may fear, neglected their duty: their lamp of vital religion expired. By neglecting the talents given them, they provoked the Lord to take them away.

They of Pergamos, who are condemned for corrupt doctrine, God threatens to come quickly and fight against them with the sword of his mouth: to visit them with great calamities, which, except they repented, he should soon *pronounce* against them. The Sardians also, except they repent, he would visit suddenly with his judgments. But for that kind of indifference, called lukewarmness, worse than coldness, he expresses the utmost abhorrence. The Ephesians, though praised for holding with patience, the true faith, had provoked the Lord by their coldness. But this apathy; this insensibility both to the doctrines and practice of religion; this total absence of all pious affection and Christian love, incurs the severest judgments —even utter extinction: from which, may the Lord, in his merciful goodness, deliver us, by awak-

ening us to righteousness, and warming our hearts with a holy zeal.

But if we would escape the awful maledictions denounced against those Christians in Asia, we must hearken also, and chiefly to what they are *exhorted*. Had they with due attention considered this part of what the Spirit said, they had flourished even to this present day. Through the Lord's goodness, with us are many blessings yet remaining, and with his grace assisting, we may avail ourselves of these seasonable exhortations.

The exhortation first given to them, and which to all is the most necessary, is to repent: to consider wherein we are deficient: to remember whence we have fallen: to do our first works, or such as Christians ought first and last to do. "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against him." We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who pleads on our behalf, *Lord let them alone this year also.* "Those who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion," he will not immediately cast out, though he finds them fruitless. He has long patience with a cold and backsliding people. He will try correction before he utterly casts away. "As many as I love," he says, "I *rebuke* and *chasten:* be zealous, therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock." His judgments are abroad in the earth: the rod of his correction is uplifted: but his patience yet continues. "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup

with him, and he with me." He would rather bless than correct us; would rather *come in to us*, than cast us out. To day then let us hear his voice, and harden not our hearts.

The Spirit exhorts also, to "strengthen the things which remain and are ready to die." If then the true doctrines of the cross are still taught in our Churches, and the faith as it is in Christ Jesus, is yet by some received and professed; let it not be a cold assent of the understanding, but a lively, vigorous principle, affecting the heart. Contend earnestly for this faith; but strive lawfully, and let its truth and excellence appear chiefly in the fruit of good living. If the discipline and order of our Church be wholesome and according to apostolic usage, let them be enforced and regarded with energy and care. If our worship and liturgy preserve in expression that pure spirit of a lively faith; that fervent piety and rational devotion which so eminently distinguish the language of the inspired writings, let us adhere to those standards; let us be punctual in our attendance on all the services of the sanctuary; being careful above all things, that the fervour and affection of our hearts correspond with the offering of our lips. Do we, brethren, as we ought, avail ourselves of these excellent guides? They contain the concentered wisdom and piety of ages: they have been matured and confirmed by the experience of antiquity; sanctioned and sealed by the faith of millions and the blood of martyrs. Our prosperity and usefulness, as a Church of Christ,

and as members of the community, must depend, under God, upon our union; and this on our steadfast adherence to our established order and worship. Our Rules and Canons give sufficient scope for the most ardent piety and active zeal. For though it may seem, in some things, and on some occasions, that devotion would be excited, or the interest of religion promoted by a departure from them; it is certain that no advantages derived from such irregularity will countervail its inconvenience, and its many evils. Let us first and faithfully perform the duties which the Church requires of its members, and we shall not be unfaithful to our Divine Master.

In what is offered, however, on this head, let it not be supposed that we have respect chiefly to mere forms and ceremonies, and to things of minor importance, to the neglect of "weightier matters." These especially ought we to do, and not to leave the others undone. Where the Church has judged it expedient to direct us in the performance of any duty, her authority is to be regarded: but it is most necessary to observe those things which are commanded, not only by the Church, but by its Divine Head—even by the Word of God. To these let us attend with the most scrupulous fidelity. In preaching the Word, let us not fail to declare the whole counsel of God, as set forth at large in the holy Scriptures, and clearly explained in the Articles and Homilies of our Church. In administering the sacraments of Jesus Christ, let us not deviate from the rules pre-

scribed. Let children, as the Church directs, be early brought to baptism; and let them be seasonably and carefully instructed in the Catechism, and brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Let those who charitably become their sponsors, most conscientiously do the duties of that office, not doubting but God approves, and will surely reward their labour of love. To restrain youth from the snares of vice, and the practice of ungodliness; to train them up in the ways of virtue and religion, and early to imbue their minds with the doctrines of their Saviour, is truly a most pious and good work, and great is our obligation to those who faithfully perform it. May the Lord "remember them for good concerning this." Much care is required, and should, with corresponding diligence be bestowed in preparing young people for confirmation, that this ordinance may neither be neglected, nor, without due consideration, be received. Too much care cannot be given in preparations for the Lord's Supper: that all Christians may see and feel, that "the benefit is great, if with a true penitent heart and lively faith, they receive that holy sacrament;" and also "the danger great, if they receive the same unworthily."

The obligations enjoined upon us by the Word of God and his Church, of visiting the sick, and watching over the spiritual state of the souls under our charge, are of immense importance; and our responsibility for their faithful discharge, is of the most serious concern. Nor are these, as to some they may seem, exclusively the duties of the

Clergy: the most faithful Minister of Christ, without the aid and co-operation of his people, can effect, comparatively, but little. Christians are a *Priesthood*, and all have duties in their respective stations, which if they neglect, all must suffer. "God hath set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him," and let *every one of them* perform its office, that health and vigour may pervade the whole. Watch over and exhort one another daily. Assist each other with your prayers—your counsels—instructions, or reproofs, as every one has need. These are among the most important duties required by our Church, and the most necessary to be observed. And these duties are not to be observed in outward appearance only; but, if we would obtain the Divine blessing, in spirit also and truth. If we would that God should draw nigh to us, we must in our hearts draw nigh to him. This is the only policy by which a Church of Christ can be built up and become the joy of the earth, and a blessing to mankind. No Church will be prospered, nor is it fitting or desirable that any should be prospered, except it possesses a holy zeal for the honour of God, and the salvation of men, and follows after true charity. The Lord abhors his own ordinances; incense is an abomination; our solemn meetings he cannot away with; except they are attended with devout affection, and hearts right towards God.

"But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation,

though we thus speak." Through the Lord's great goodness there are yet also, we trust, remaining among us no small portion of the inestimable blessings of love, and union, and brotherly affection. The harmony which has so happily existed in our Churches, demands our thankful acknowledgments to Almighty God. But who need be reminded of the vast consequence of *strengthening this thing?* Let us follow after charity, the bond of perfectness, that love may be without dissimulation. That among the most sincere and pious Christians, there should be many shades of difference in opinion respecting some abstruse doctrines, and the most prudent mode and effectual means of conducting our ministerial labours, is neither more nor less than must reasonably be expected from the nature of religion, and the common infirmities of man. But though Christians cannot in every thing be of the same mind, it is very possible and very necessary that they should be of the same spirit. Let us respect the opinions of our brethren, and bear with patient meekness what we may deem their faults or infirmities. If among us there are those in whom a sense of duty excites a more ardent zeal for the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel; who, with uncommon assiduity, labour in word and doctrine, and desire to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified; let not such be uncharitably censured; for how know we but that "God hath received them," and will bless their labours? Or should there be those of our brethren who believe that the present state of Chris-

tianity requires a more sober and formal exercise of the Gospel Ministry; that zeal should be tempered by reason and guided by knowledge; that prudence and moderation must be exercised, and much care taken that we strive lawfully; and that preaching the doctrines of the cross is less edifying and useful, than inculcating the duties of Christian life; let us take heed that such are not inconsiderately condemned as being cold or lukewarm, or unfriendly to Evangelical truth.* "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master" let him stand or fall. Let us not vainly suppose that every opinion is to be stretched or cut to our own length. Men have their peculiar gifts and talents: let each one exercise his own, and "prophesy according to the proportion of faith." "Let each be persuaded in his own mind," and "wait on his ministry" in that manner which he conscientiously believes will best promote the honour of God. "Let us not judge one another any more; but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block, or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. Let us follow after the things which make for peace, and the things wherewith one may edify another." The "Lord has taught that all our doings without charity are nothing worth." Let us strive for this "bond of

* It is not here intended to give any countenance to irregularity in conduct, unsoundness in doctrine, or unfaithfulness in preaching the Gospel: but to commend that charity which *believeth all things*, and is most essential to the Christian character, and the prosperity of true religion.

peace and of all virtues." Let all who are brethren in Jesus Christ, love one another, and "endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." What other motive can we need for the discharge of this most essential duty, than the serious consideration that "there is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism." "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit;" and let the same Spirit rule in every Christian's heart. Let not the brother of low degree be despised; but rather "condescend to men of low estate," "in honour preferring one another."

There are, we may hope, many duties which we are yet in the habit of performing. Let not this performance be languid and lifeless; let us not only be ready to every good work; but with good will do it, as to the Lord, and not to men. God loves a cheerful giver.

If we still find some (which God be praised there are) who are not ashamed to bear the name of Christ, let them be encouraged and exhorted, that, "with purpose of heart, they cleave unto the Lord," and "hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering." Let us diligently endeavour, as the Lord shall give the power, by our prayers, our counsel, and our example, "to strengthen such as do stand; to comfort and help the weak hearted; to raise up those who fall, and finally" to "cast down—every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and to bring

into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

To animate us in this glorious work, the Lord our Redeemer, in these epistles to his Churches, has graciously added the encouragement of many great and precious promises. To him that overcometh, and keepeth his words faithful unto the end, he "will give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God:" a paradise far more blessed than that which Adam lost. The faithful shall be exalted to the highest heaven, and partake of that vital tree of knowledge, the Divine Saviour, whom to know is eternal life; they are promised "a crown of life" immortal. During their pilgrimage in this earthly wilderness, they "shall eat of the hidden manna;" they shall have the present comforts of God's Word, and a foretaste of those glories which shall hereafter be revealed. The Christian "shall be clothed with a white raiment," even the spotless robe of his Saviour's righteousness. His name shall not be blotted out of the book of life: he shall be set as "a pillar in the house of God." Finally, saith the Lord Jesus, "to him that overcometh I will grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches."

How worthy then of our serious consideration on the present occasion is this solemn admonition of the Saviour of the world! How momentous are the things which the Spirit here declares! and

how interesting to the Churches represented in this Convention! However imperfectly the application has been suggested, the good sense of this assembly will supply the deficiency. Sufficient we trust has been said to evince the duties and the responsibility of those who are here convened. With what awakened attention ought we to hearken to this warning voice of the Divine Spirit, as spoken to the Churches which we now represent, and especially to us, as their appointed watchmen, accountable to God, in a high degree, for their faith and steadfastness. We are assembled here in the name and presence of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, to consult on what is most interesting to the peace, and comfort, and eternal welfare of our fellow mortals; and to preserve pure and inviolate that holy faith once delivered by Divine inspiration, to the saints of God. We are here assembled, to devise, as the Lord shall give us wisdom, the most prudent and effectual means and measures of building up the Churches with which we are connected; of promoting the salvation of mankind, and of enlarging the kingdom of the blessed Redeemer. We are here assembled, to "banish and drive away from the Church all erroneous and strange doctrines, contrary to God's Word;" to preserve and enforce a pure worship and godly discipline; and to diffuse, among all ranks of people, the knowledge of Christ, and the practice of true godliness. Such should be the object, and such the result of our present deliberations. How great then should be our solicitude; how

earnest and devout our prayers, that the Lord, by his Spirit, will be with us; that he will "save us from all error, ignorance, pride, and prejudice;" that "of his great mercy he will vouchsafe so to direct, sanctify, and govern us in our present work, by the mighty power of the Holy Ghost, that (through our faithful exertions) the comfortable Gospel of Christ may be truly preached, truly received, and truly followed;" that we may have wisdom to devise, and zeal to pursue whatever will tend to the promotion of true religion; that we may "stand fast in one Spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel." Let no selfish, interested motives, or worldly considerations affect our judgments, or divert our views from that work of our Divine Master, now committed to our care. With souls united, and with hearts raised to God, let us most deliberately proceed to the business of this Convention, each member, according to his station and office, attentively considering what the Spirit saith.

To us, respected brethren of the Episcopal order, our subject has peculiar application. The angels of the Churches were responsible for their fidelity, and not less will the Lord require still of those whom he sets as watchmen in Zion. To be answerable, not only for ourselves, but thousands of others, must cause, to a reflecting mind, the most serious anxieties. Who that feels the weight of such a charge, can quietly give sleep to his eyes, or slumber to his eyelids? It is an office scarce possibly to be desired of those who feel its

cares and know its duties: an office, of which, says Bishop Taylor, "the honour does not pay the burden." And as a greater than he has said, it is an office which renders one the servant of all: and easily may we conceive of that extreme reluctance, with which, in the primitive ages, this stewardship was assumed. It is to be supposed of such that they *love their Divine Master more than others:* how ought they then to *feed his lambs;* to *feed his sheep!* As the chief pastor of the flock, and centre of union in the diocess, the Bishop should be a common father, to whom the Christian family may seek for counsel, and look for an example, of every grace and every good work. Alas, "who is sufficient unto these things?" Not only the nature of our office, but the providence of God, and in language the most awakening, is calling us to diligence and fidelity. At the last meeting of this Convention, the memory of two of this order, recently removed from their labours on earth, demanded the tear of fraternal affection. We have now to add, to this mournful catalogue, the names of three more, beloved and much respected brethren, who have fallen asleep.* What a proportion to be taken in six years from so small a number? How doth it behove us, few survivors, whatever our hand findeth to do, to do it with all our might.

Great is the responsibility; and much, through the Divine blessing, may be effected by the zeal

* Bishops Provoost, Moore, and Claggett.

and fidelity of each member present: and it is chiefly to you, brethren and friends, the Clerical and Lay Delegates of this Convention, that we look for counsel and aid. To your piety, wisdom, and holy zeal, the Churches of our Communion in these United States, now commends, under God, her concerns, her interests, and her general welfare. It cannot be necessary, from this place, even to suggest how very much the present state of religion in this country requires our united efforts, and most arduous exertions in its sacred cause. In the last few years the Lord has smiled upon us in many blessings, and crowned our labours, we trust, with much fruit to his glory and praise. We have the great comfort of beholding Zion in some degree of prosperity. Something has already been effected; but yet, how small a part of that vast work which our hand findeth to do! What waste places remain; what desolations yet appear! What new labours are also rising to our view! We see fields beyond fields, which "are white already to harvest." Myriads of souls flocking to our Western States, destitute of religious teachers and the means of salvation, and sinking, we may well fear, into spiritual ignorance and thoughtless dissipation, demand the pious regard of this Convention. It is of immense importance that the blessings of the Saviour's Gospel be extended to these people; and too long already for the credit and the interest of our Communion, has this charitable work been delayed. Our Christian brethren of the various denominations, will, no doubt, and they certainly

do, give great attention to this interesting part of our country. Shall we only be remiss in such a labour of love? Shall not our standards appear among those rising millions, where already are dispersed thousands of our Christian brethren, craving the bread of eternal life; and suffering "a famine of hearing the Word of God!" "Hungry and thirsty, their soul faints within them." And others, though boasting indeed that they "are rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing," are spiritually "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

But, while we would extend the comforts and blessings of religion to others, let us not forget, what is still more essential, to practise it ourselves. Let us banish and drive away all corruption of life and doctrine, "and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life." May the Lord mercifully be with us, and direct our counsels to his glory, and to the prosperity and the salvation of his people: May he give us ears to hear, and hearts to understand, and wills to obey the warnings of his Spirit, and the oracles of his Word. And to HIM, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all glory and praise, world without end. *Amen.*

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